

# My Message from the Virgin\*

*Mercedes Salisachs, the Catalonian authoress well-known throughout Spain, was one of those fortunate enough to be present during many of the remarkable ecstasies of the four young visionaries at Garabandal. But for her, all that she witnessed there pales in comparison to what she experienced during her first visit. Here, in her own words, is the moving account of what happened that memorable April of 1962.*



When I first set out for the village of Garabandal, I wanted to come closer to God and render homage to the Virgin Mary, although, naturally enough, I still had doubts as to the authenticity of the alleged apparitions. The fact is that my religious life had undergone a considerable change some three and a half years earlier, as a result of the death of my son, Miguel, and following an inner crisis that had entirely swept aside the deep rooted habits and theories of a lifetime.

Although I was a practicing Catholic, it was from force of habit and a sense of duty rather than from love of God. Miguel, on the other hand, was religious in the "spiritual" sense. The firmness of his faith was astonishing; especially the maturity of his reasoning. Everything he did and thought had an underlying religious purpose.

Not yet 22 years old, he had everything to look forward to. He was engaged to be married and was emerging as a sensitive and talented artist whose works were praised by all the Spanish press in posthumous exhibitions in Madrid and Barcelona.

Everyone considered Miguel as my *alter ego*, my real confidant and inseparable companion. In our spare time (Miguel, his fiancée and I) were wont to get together. His whims were always the same as mine and our plans were always made together. For my part, having him at my side was like owning a piece of cosmos. On him I focused all my good aspirations, and I believe he had the same attitude towards me. In fact, he was not just my son, but my best friend, too.

Shortly before his death, Miguel

\*Excerpted from *The Apparitions of Garabandal* by F. Sanchez Ventura y Pascual.

*Mercedes Salisachs with her son, Manuel, in a late 1950's photo.*

*The scene that greeted Mercedes Salisachs when she arrived in Garabandal in 1962.*

and his fiancée became daily communicants. "I've been to Communion twenty days running," he said. "What a fool I am for not having done it before!"

### **The Accident**

Then came that frightful day. On October 30, 1958, after going to Communion as usual, Miguel set off for France with four fellow artists. About six miles from their destination, they had a bad automobile accident. Two of them were killed instantly. Two survived. Miguel died at six o'clock the following morning. It was doubtful that he would ever have regained consciousness.

His death snuffed out the main point of my life. On losing him I felt overwhelmed by the most horrifying, stygian gloom. People told me I would get over it in time. They said little by little I would get used to it. It was not so, the more the time passed, the emptier, sadder and more lost I felt.

Some resorted to religious reasoning. They spoke to me of Christian resignation, reminded me of Miguel's great faith, of his exemplary death, and said I should praise God for having taken him from me with his soul in such happy circumstances. But resignation would not come, and all their persuasion struck me as empty, thoughtless arguments.

There even came a time when doubts about my faith became my obsession. Religion took on the appearance of a repair-patch on a burst tire, and everything that I had hitherto admitted without undue effort now started to crumble, plunging me into greater and greater depression. In this fashion, I finally turned into an empty shell with no horizon but the past, and no hope for the future but death.

The collapse of my morale was



shattering. The temptation to 'doubt' continually assailed me. I got the impression that after death everything was over, that hope was nothing but a great lie, and that faith was a childish myth invented to keep us in order.

My doubts, however, did not win completely. Sometimes, for some unknown reason, hope returned. 'What if Miguel can see me? What if the dogma of the Communion of Saints is true...?' It was as if Miguel were tugging at me; as if he were screaming out to me to arouse me from my apathy.

At that period, I could not even pray. I always ran into a blank wall of doubt.

The fact was I needed some proof; something to make me realize that beyond death's threshold, life continued. But proof was not forthcoming, and, to tell the truth, I did not do anything to seek it out, either. My devotion to our Blessed Lady was practically non-existent.

One day, shortly before the feast of the Immaculate Conception, almost instinctively I found myself before a statue of Our Lady of Sorrows, begging the Blessed Virgin to give me proof that Miguel indeed existed still.

Proof was not long in coming. It was indisputable evidence. So incontestable was it that, even if someone were now to explain it away with normal arguments, I should still be convinced that what happened was

nevertheless an answer from Our Lady.

From that day onwards, I had no other obsession than to return to God. On May 4, 1959, I made a general confession and my peace with God, once and for all, resolving never to part from Him for a single second of my remaining life. Everything began to change for me. Though I still missed Miguel greatly and loneliness continued to torment me, my inward peace was now a great balm. My devotion to the Virgin Mary grew day by day.

So it was that, when I heard of the children of Garabandal, I made up my mind to visit their little village, not just out of curiosity, but with the idea of rendering homage to the Virgin.

### **My First Trip to Garabandal**

I left Barcelona on Maundy Thursday (1962) and reached Garabandal on Good Friday.

The village *en masse* had congregated in the church to celebrate the Holy Week ceremonies. From time to time the children passed close by. They appeared to be on very friendly terms with the Marqués and Marquesa de Santa Maria, who introduced me into the children's private circle.

That afternoon, I entrusted Jacinta with some pious objects to give to the Virgin to kiss.

I made the same request of her and



*Mercedes prays at the Pines in Garabandal.*

her fellow visionaries: "Ask the Virgin for news of my son." I think it was Jacinta who inquired, "What's wrong with your son?" I told her he had died.

This done, I made my way to Mari Loli's where everyone was waiting for her next apparition. I gave Mari Loli a sheet of paper written on both sides and told her I did not expect an answer. "The only thing I should like to know is where my son is." I did not mention his name.

It was not long before we heard the characteristic thud of Mari Loli falling to her knees. It came from upstairs. Silence fell and only a short time had elapsed when we saw Mari

*Mari Loli (left) and Jacinta in ecstasy. No matter how many ecstasies Mercedes and other witnesses saw, each one was a new experience.*



Loli descending the stairs, her eyes staring heavenwards and her face transfigured, holding hands with another little girl.

I don't think the greatest actress could imitate that expression.

Mari Loli went to the table on which lay the objects to be presented to the Virgin. She began to hold them aloft to be kissed. I saw her pick up my sheet of paper, raise it on high, turn it around and deposit it back on the table.

Then, clutching her crucifix, she went out into the street. Her regular strides were light and easy. It was as though she were walking on a smooth, flat surface instead of the quagmires, puddles, rubble and stones that were underfoot.

Thus far, the evening had been none too pleasant for me. As often as Mari Loli had given the cross to be kissed, she had overlooked me. I was deeply pained by the suspicion that, if all this were true, the Virgin Mary was deliberately evading my kiss.

Mari Loli had gone up to the Pines, but so steep was the path, that exhaustion prevented me from following. When she at last came down the mountainside, I saw her running backwards, her gaze piercing the gloomy sky overhead, avoiding obstacles and pot holes as if she had eyes in the back of her head. As she reached the village, she was joined by Jacinta; they laughed as they met. Both of them proffered their crucifixes for people to kiss as they walked on arm in arm.

At the church door, Jacinta emerged from her trance. Mari Loli returned home, still in a state of ecstasy.

#### **Was There News for Me?**

I asked Jacinta for news of Miguel. The child replied that the Virgin had not answered her query. Downcast, I

tackled Mari Loli next. Her response was identical. "Did she read my sheet of paper?" I urged. "Yes, she read it."

That same night, when Mari Loli fell into an ecstatic trance for the second time, she was joined at once by Jacinta who was walking through the streets in ecstasy, too. Again, they gave all the onlookers their crucifixes to kiss; again when they came my way, they passed my lips by.

But the worst of all was what they told me on re-emerging. Both Jacinta and Mari Loli told me, "The Blessed Virgin gave me her answer, but I can't tell you what it is."

That reply was far worse than the previous one. There was no escaping the obvious conclusions. Either I did not deserve to be answered by the Virgin, or else, despite every supposition to the contrary, Miguel was in a place of which it was "better to remain in ignorance."

I goaded Mari Loli to tell me whether the Virgin's answer was pleasant or otherwise. "I can't say, I can't say..." she evaded my questioning. Her face was quite inscrutable.

Going to bed that night, I felt as if I had been turned into a block of ice. The suspicion that neither God nor our Blessed Mother wanted to have anything to do with me depressed me as much as my assumption that Miguel might be suffering punishment. But, somehow it seemed out of the question to doubt Miguel's salvation.

On the evening of Holy Saturday, I was present during an ecstasy of Conchita. If memory serves me right, I was not given the crucifix to kiss that night, either. If I did manage to kiss it at any particular point, it was purely by chance in passing as it was offered to someone else.

I was so depressed by the apparent





*Jacinta and Mari Loli in ecstasy walk through the streets of the village as the onlookers move aside. Both girls told Mercedes the same story. "The Blessed Virgin gave me her answer, but I can't tell you what it is."*

friend, the Marquesa de Santa Maria arm in arm with Mari Loli. "Mari Loli says she has something to say to you," she confided.

At that moment, I could not think what she was referring to. I remembered that, following her ecstasy that evening (before the midnight Mass, of course), I had spoken to the child and she had been as secretive as ever. Just as I had resolved, I had asked her no further questions, and she, for her part, had shown no signs of wishing to talk, either. So I could not grasp what she could possibly want to tell me.

But the Marquesa added, "It has something to do with what the Virgin told her yesterday, but it seems she was commanded to keep it quiet until after one o'clock today."

Rather abashed, Mari Loli was saying: "Later on; I'll tell her afterwards..." We were walking along in procession reciting the rosary and it was hardly proper to halt for a mere message.

Confused, I did not know whose side to take. But the Marquesa, who had seen the bad time I had been having, insisted, "Not on your life! You're to tell her this minute. You can't leave this lady in such suspense."

Mari Loli and I drew slightly away from the procession. Disconcerted, and still fearful of what might be in store for me, I bent down for the little girl to whisper in my ear.

In a clear voice she gave me the message: "*Our Lady says your son is in Heaven.*"

I cannot say precisely what happened after that. Everything about me seemed in such a whirl that it was no easy matter to reconstruct the scene. Everything, absolutely everything, was as nought beside that one sentence.

The only thing I remember clearly

"disdain" that the Apparition was showing me that, without stopping to think of the undoubted generosity shown to others, I firmly resolved not to ask any more questions or to expect the slightest sign through the children.

Following a long-standing local custom, in the pre-dawn hours of Easter Sunday, the village women started to sing the rosary. Despite my weariness, I felt impelled to join

them. The devoutness of that scene was truly impressive; I cannot remember ever having spent an Easter of such profound religious fervor as that one.

### **The Unexpected**

We must have been mid-way through the third mystery when the unexpected happened.

All at once I felt someone prodding me in the back. Turning, I saw my



This 1962 photo shows Mercedes with Civil Guard chief, Juan Alvarez Seco and the four visionaries, from left: Conchita, Mari Cruz, Loli and Jacinta.

was hugging Mari Loli as if I were embracing Miguel. Then I found myself hugging the Marquesa. She, too, was crying. People were milling round about us; it was like being on a roller coaster with more and more people joining us. They were all looking at me, fright mingling with emotion on their faces. Alarmed at the interruption of the procession, Conchita's mother came over to comfort me. "If she's crying because they haven't given her the crucifix to kiss, tell the lady that they haven't given it to me tonight, either," she consoled.

When they told her mine were tears of joy, the good woman looked relieved. The rest of that rosary was like winging up to Heaven. All my earlier depression had disappeared. I recollect handing the Marquesa my walking stick and clinging to Mari Loli's arm. Never in my life had I felt so light-hearted or so secure. Tears still stinging my eyes, we rejoined the procession through the streets in those early hours before dawn. I think I prayed more with my eyes than with my lips. Mari Loli was saying over and over, "Don't cry, don't cry. . ." But there was no taking notice of her plea. There was so much to cry about! She insisted, "You ought to be very happy."

Now, I did not bother to look where I was going. I no longer needed a flashlight; Mari Loli's arm was firm in mine. Full of confidence in her guidance and trust in the Blessed Virgin, I walked the rest of

the way gazing up at the heavens. I have never seen the sky so clear and studded with stars; every twinkle was a smile.

### There's More to the Message

It was 3:00 a.m. Still stunned by what had happened to me, I heard the Marquesa whispering to Mari Loli, "But, my dear child, don't keep it to yourself! Tell her now." The Marquesa turned to me, adding, "Mari Loli says the message she gave you is incomplete, but as you started to cry she couldn't go on telling you the rest of it."

What the child had to tell me this time left me still more overcome. "The Blessed Virgin also told me that your son is very happy, extremely happy, and he's at your side *every day*."

She at once went on, "I already knew your son was in Heaven; Our Lady told me so yesterday. But she also said, 'Don't tell the lady until tomorrow, after Sunday Mass,' that's why I kept quiet about it until now."

From the moment of that crisis, everything changed for me. No sooner had the child fallen to her knees in a trance than I had proof that my earlier "ostracism" had ended. She came straight to me. She held the crucifix to my lips, once, twice, thrice; then, making the Sign of the Cross over my forehead, lips and heart, she held the crucifix up to the Virgin to kiss once more and, as if in final confirmation of all she had just

told me, she held it out to me again.

Thereupon, without proffering it to anyone else, she went out into the night.

When I went outside, Mari Loli's father, Ceferino, beckoned me over. "She's talking to the Virgin about you," he said. Sure enough, she was undoubtedly speaking about me: "I told her not to cry, and that she ought to be happy, but she took no notice." After a brief pause she went on. "And what if she starts crying again when I tell her?"

As soon as she emerged from her trance, Mari Loli came over and informed me in a low voice that Our Lady had given her another message. She waited until we were alone. "While I was speaking to the Virgin," she said, "I noticed she was laughing a lot and looking upwards, and when I asked her why she was laughing so, she replied that at the very moment she was talking to me, 'he' was looking at you and was very happy."

"Who do you mean, Mari Loli? M--?" I could not get his name out.

But she forestalled me. "That's right, Miguel. The Blessed Mother said to me, 'Above all, tell the lady that this very minute while I am speaking to you, Miguel is watching her, and that he is full of joy, that he is very happy; very, very happy indeed.'"

"Tell me, Mari Loli, how did you know his name is Miguel?"

The little girl was quite unperturbed. Very simply, she replied, "Because I asked her, 'Who is Miguel?' and she said to me, 'That lady's son'."

I returned to the house where I was lodging as if I were walking on air. The village was tinged with blue under a sky in which the stars still shone. The first rays of the rising sun were peeping over the mountains. □

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